

# **An Investigation of anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) Campaign**

**D. Prasad<sup>1</sup>, VikramendraKumar<sup>2</sup>& L.S. Baikani<sup>3</sup>**

**Corresponding Address**

Devi Prasad, Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad. Email:

dpsocio@gmail.com

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, New Delhi. Email:

bardhan.vikramendra@gmail.com

Post-Doctoral Fellow, Department of Political Science, University of Hyderabad. Email:

lingam33@gmail.com

## **Abstract**

The present paper examines how social media was used during the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) campaign. Now, it would be interesting to investigate the role of social media especially publicized applications like blogs, Whatsapp, Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, which have shown much more significant impact on youths during anti-CAA protests. The rise of social media and its influence on thinking patterns over youths were visible across the country. The roles of youth wings, student organizations, civil society, activists, etc., have been investigated to get an in-depth understanding. The University of Hyderabad is the primary field of investigation for the present research.

**Keywords:** CAA, Minorities, Movement, Social Media, UoH, Youth]

## **Introduction**

Social media has played as a tool to combine the anti-protesters of CAA and NRC. This noteworthy issue is widely discussed on various digital communication platforms like social media, news websites, YouTube, and print media. These platforms have significant influence over youth, especially internet users, because the internet-based communication technologies have enabled people to spread their thoughts, observations, and messages to many audiences and readers even if they are dispersed geographically. The young activists working to protect India's social diversities have, indeed, been able to find a global audience supporting their cause and giving strength to their voice.

## **Social media as a means of communication: Conceptual framework**

It appears that due to continuously improving literacy rates across the world and evolving communication technologies, people are becoming more aware of their socio-political rights. Communication, in every age, has played a key role in identifying, defining and addressing the contemporary challenges of human society. If we look at the above issue in Gandhian framework, we can say that the biggest challenge of our age is the fast deteriorating moral and socio-political values that pose threats of many kinds to the future of human beings. Because of the excessive political interventions in the Indian constitution, people are getting deprived of essential life-sustaining elements like freedom of legal rights. Many instances of political imposition are becoming an inevitable part of the new generation, especially minorities and Adivasis.

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Besides, Internet-facilitated digital communication plays a significant role in informing people about moral values being carried out by the organizations, groups, and individuals, translating into political awareness and sensitivity among them (Prasad & Bibhar, 2020; Prasad & Srihari, 2017). Similarly, there have been many instances wherein people have given wholehearted support, as seen in the case of ShaheenBagh in New Delhi.

The use of mobile phones as an effective medium of communication in grassroots interventions and movements has become very common these days (Castells, 2009). This is a trend that could be seen globally. Unlike the conventional mass media outlets, the fluid nature of the internet-facilitated digital communication devices - like mobile phones suits the loosely organized non-hierarchical character of the grassroots environmental movements and activism (Anderson, 2014). Such efficient use of the internet and mobile phones could be seen in several grassroots environmental interventions in India.

### **Methodology**

We have gone through two ideological groups. One group supports while the other social group opposes CAA. We have used research scheduled, interview, and group discussion. Some personal experiences from the field observations of the researcher's doctoral research project are also included to understand the effectiveness and worthwhile digital platforms of social media like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc., which have a much more significant impact at the grassroots level.

### **Digital outlets serving as communication aids in grassroots interventions**

This time, CAA has become a law, but even before that, the BharatiyaJanata Party (BJP) party kept this controversial issue in its manifesto and had tried to pass it. The article underscores the concern of students on 'the Citizenship (Amendment) ACT, which has been amendment previously in 1986, 2003, and 2005 but CAA, 2019, received more considerable attention and strong protest across the country and has become a headline in national and international media.

We can see that different ideological groups of students of India have been raising their voices for social justice and the betterment of society from time to time. Similarly, one ideological group of students believed the issue of citizenship is closely associated with injustice as well as the emotion of the religious minorities of India because the citizenry is the evidence for the autochthony of the population inhabiting the geographical area of this peninsular sub-continent. Similarly, many leading newspapers are reporting that the students of various universities, especially AligarhMuslimUniversity (AMU, U.P.), Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU, Hyderabad), *JamiaMilliaIslamia* University (JMIU, Delhi), Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU, Delhi), University of Hyderabad (UoH, Hyderabad), Osmania University (OU, Hyderabad) etcetera are protesting against CAA for a quite long time (The Economic Times, 2019). The primary aim of their protest is to 'save' the secular values of the Indian constitution. Therefore, a famous slogan -see the preamble of the Indian constitution and save the constitution- has been given by the protestors in the nationalist framework (The Financial Express, 2019). This protest is unique in itself because saving the preamble of the constitution has become the main theme in the history of the student movement in India. The background of unrest among protestors emerged out from various issues like 'thirteen-point-roster', 'coloring the students' by framing them 'anti-national', 'tukde-tukde gang' (separatist gang), 'urbanNaxal,' 'bhatkehuye log' (uprooted people), etc. The majority of students feel their fundamental rights are 'under attack' and aimless future in the current government (Gurung, 2018). The unrest among students can be seen after the 2014 election of Lok Sabha, especially after the disruption in IIT (Indian Institute of Technology), Madras, (Rajgopal, 2015), the suicide of RohithVemulain UoH, (The Wire, 2019)the disappearance of Najeeb Ahmed from JNU (Sidharth, 2019). The few famous slogans"not in my name,""no place for Islamophobia," and "shed hate, not blood", attractedthe attention of the ordinary citizens of India (The Wire, 2017).These slogans are used by the protesters to show 'something is unusual or not common,' which is happening in the country' in the last seven years.

### **Dialogue in a healthy democracy**

December 19<sup>th</sup> is historically significant for every Indian patriot, symbolizing the heritage of the Indian freedom struggle and consolidated unity led by M.K. Gandhi, J.L. Nehru, etc. The opposition party Congress also claims that "the constitution, drafted by B.R. Ambedkar, is being violated and is under attack."Therefore, the outrage in universities and colleges across the country has chosen 19<sup>th</sup> December to condemn the unconstitutional and disruptive laws of the NDA government. Moreover, there has been continuous protest across the nation about the Citizenship Amendment Act, which aims to save the plurality and diversity of the country. According to AsaduddinOwaisi, "The introduction of the CAB is a disrespect to our freedom fighters as it will revive the principle

of two nations. As a Muslim, I rejected the principle of Jinnah. Now you remain a law that will remind people of two nations” (The Hindusthan Times, 2020).

### **Communal harmony and CAA**

Students, intellectuals, and civil society believe that the constitution’s provision of equality (Art. 14) has been violated in the amendment. Therefore, the larger sections of society feel that the CAA harasses as well as harms the foundation on which the Republic of India was established. CAA also ignores the realities of India’s unity in diversity and freedom struggle, the secular and civic values on which we gained independence. Similarly, India has been a melting pot of diverse cultures, which have been appreciated for tolerance and admired for the overall accommodative hospitality. India has been home not only to the Indians but also to the citizens who have settled colonially, for instance, the French, Dutch, Bangladeshi, etc.

The Indian government and police also must learn to differentiate between ‘uncontrolled mob’ and peaceful protesters. The peaceful protest gives way to fresh and healthy dialogue in democracy among perpetrators and mute spectators. It is counted that the BJP ruling states have been more violent toward protesters during the CAA protest, and protesters were provoked to take law in their hand, and finally, they become an ‘uncontrolled mob’. Let me come to the point, protesters (students) are a congregation of trained people who sit together and participate or interact with each other and tried to create a healthy dialogue as well as want to come with a logical conclusion irrespective of their religion, class, caste, etc.

### **Transgressive agenda of the ruling party**

At present, India is politically ruled by the BJP government, which had won by a margin of 37.46 percent, which represents 1.3 billion of the population (The Debate, 2020). There have been numerous protests regarding the dissatisfaction with the government policies and also the straightforward oratory representation against the poor, marginalized castes, religious minorities over the rich, which has frequently led to feuds of hate crimes increasing amongst the religious groups, especially among Hindu-Muslim and student politics also. There has been consistent branding on the learned minds who consciously and responsibly criticized the government by terming them as Urban Naxals (Bose, 2019). Whoever raises the voices against the government is branded with the term ‘Anti-National.’ On the one hand, student dissents are branded ‘*tukdetukde gang*,’ and tribal dissents are downgraded as ‘*maovaadi*’. Similarly, the one community has been targeted by the so-called ‘pseudo-nationalist’ and branded as ‘Islamist Jihadi.’ They are being mob lynched by Cow-bhakta and their ‘invisible gang’ (*gowrakshak*) (Abraham, 2017).

### **The standpoint of students on CAA**

Two ideological groups of the students have been interviewed. The first group support the CAA-struggle and backed the ideology of protesters. The supporters (students) belong to Ambedkar Students Association, NSUI, Bahujan Student Front, Tribal Student Forum, and All India Students’ Association (AISA). The main arguments of protesters from these ideological groups can be divided into a few sections in the following way-

### **Democracy is under attack**

The students are taught academic literature knowledge of a subject and challenged to broaden our mindsets beyond their cultural biases towards the development of healthy scholarship for critical thinking in the university premises. Therefore, not only students or research scholars against the CAA, but also civil society from all over the country joined the protest against CAA and showed their anger by reading out the preamble of the Indian constitution, the slogans, tirangayatra, candle march, effigy burning, etc. (The Hindu, 2019). As a trained student or academician, the learned teachers expect their students to be skeptical of superstitious pride and prejudice against a community because such a notion is against the ethos of formal education. Therefore, it becomes a duty of the student to protest for such amendments, which are against the equalitarian principle of social harmony. By appearance, CAA seems to be inspired by the subjective development of ideas and ideals (both in theory and practice), which need to criticize objectively because such law is a threat to national integration and faith towards humanitarian hopes and universal brotherhood. The CAA protesters feel that India’s democracy is under attack, and there is an unannounced emergency.

### **Our voices matter, say UoHSU-2019-20**

Throughout the disciplined mode of instructional learning, content and questions related to social justice and the development of a healthy society is being taught as knowledge literature and the ardent necessity to be the

whistleblower when the situation and circumstance demand emphatically highlighted in the debates and discussions. Therefore, there has been a trend in premier institutions of India and abroad where the learned students question the authority and if they feel something is 'wrong' and they fight against the established authority. By validating their stand, this group refers to Tocqueville's (1935) opines and says that if there are the complete majority and an absence of opposition and protest, the current government will follow the roots of oppression and exploitation and the concept of 'trinity of democracy' of Tocqueville would be true.

**Facing the consequences**

Presently, students who are categorized under the dignified or noble franchise of education and application towards wisdom are protesting with the motive of justice for and against the bill of CAA and NRC, as announced by the ruling party BJP. The students are taking part in the entire movement, but the country's youth are protesting against the CAA announced to be enacted by 2024 (Deka, 2019). There has been a peaceful demonstration of protests and also protests that seemed violent due to the impeding police attacks on the public. Notably, the attack of police into the Jamia Islamia by offensively transgressing their entry into the women's toilets, library, and also into hostels has been considered atrocious and obnoxious. The students have been held hostage and terrorized; the internet facility has been disconnected, and also the press media are prohibited from entering. The students were made to put their hands up and march out of the campus at gunpoint of the police. The students have vehemently raised their voices of turmoil against the state and police. Teargas shells and lathi charges furiously meted the protests, which had been organized as peaceful marches. Despite precocious and harmful health consequences, the students bravely tried saving their fellow students from the police brutality irrespective of gender. So many girls and boys were seriously injured while they were protecting each other.

**What neutral students think**

The issues of cost and giving employment to the 'new citizens' (who are supposed to come from the above-stated countries) are also coming in its way. Therefore, non-BJP ruling states have denied implementing this amendment. Goldy M. George (2020) says, "In Assam alone, it took ten years to complete the National Register of Citizens (NRC). The exercise required the services of 52,000 people and cost 16 billion rupees. Assam has a population of 30 million. If one takes this exercise as standard, then for India's estimated 1.37 billion people, the cost would be a staggering 7.31 billion rupees" (Georg, 2020). The students of this category also believe that the BJP-led government wants to distract ordinary people who face challenges from economic slowdown, unemployment, price hick, mob lynching, etc. in their daily lives.

**Left-wing on CAA**

We often hear a proverb in academia, 'left is left, right is also not right.' It means there is a great need for discussion and debate for any concerning issue, which matters for the people. "The Kerala Assembly passed a resolution on December 31, 2019, demanding the repeal of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)" (Nair, 2020). Earlier, some non-BJP ruled states like West Bengal had announced that they would not follow the CAA, but Kerala is the first state to pass a resolution and register its protest. In this regard, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, while presenting this proposal, said, "The CAA is against the 'secular' view and fabric of the country and giving citizenship in it will discriminate on the basis of religion." The president of the current students' union (2019-20) of University of Hyderabad (HCUSU) hails from a leftist organization circulated a poster against CAA and opines that CAA violates the fundamental right to equality and Article 14 of the Indian constitution guarantee equal treatment to all citizens irrespective of their caste, gender, religion, and so on. Most of the representatives of the HCUSU feel that CAA is against the secular principle of the Indian constitution as it processes a criterion of granting citizenship based on religion. They also raised their voices against the interests of Northeastern states as CAA violates constitutional promises of safeguarding indigenous culture and society. The members of current HCU-SU also claim that 'leftists are not against giving citizenship to persecuted people from the neighboring countries of India, but they are protesting because of exclusion of few communities and neighboring nations.'

**Standpoint of the CAA supporters: Who are they?**

The supporter of CAA is also a sympathizer of the NDA government. The force of being a majority also fills these people with the belief that their vision on CAA is the ultimate and authentic vision, that they are the whole country and the one who opposes their thinking is a traitor, an urban Naxalite, tukde-tukde-gang. The supporters of CAA are against the politics in favor of Rohith Vemula, Najeeb, Kanhaiya Kumar and Aishe Ghosh. After talking to a few

students and going through the pamphlets of the student's wing of BJP, it is found that they feel that CAA would not violate article 371 of the Indian constitution. They firmly believe that 'CAA aims to target 'genuine refugees of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan, but intruders'. CAA has nothing to do with fresh migration, unemployment as well as minorities or 'tribal' of North East. The Bill clearly distinguishes between exodus due to religious persecution and displacement of people due to political upheaval.

In contrast, one group said, "The well-orchestrated realm of decrementing and discriminating particular religious minorities is a false notion and in fact threatening the cultural fabric of the nation. The idea of India does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of religion neither by the government nor the by the individuals. As stated by many, it will not violate Article 14 of the Constitution of India as the citizenship is not being granted on the basis of a particular religion but persecuted religions which can be considered as a reasonable restriction."

ABVP strongly believes that people lived peacefully in Sindh in undivided India when Indian Congress and the All-India Muslim League decided to divide their homes via partition. "Sindhis (read Hindu and Sikhs) were persecuted and they had no choice but to leave Sindh and move to India as 'refugees'. The people who choose to stay in their native place were forced to change their religious beliefs to Islam homeland", says Aarti Nagpal (ex-president of ABVP). Another group of ABVP-HCU pointed out that a country that is Islamic Republic and not secular; a nation where minorities have decreased since partition (1947) to less than 5 per cent has the audacity to comment on India's decision for CAB. Prasant Maharaj (a member of ABVP-HCU) asked, "Had Hindus were not forced to leave from the Islamic land. Have they been not tortured to convert their religion? India cannot forget how Hindus had to leave behind their homes and family for survival during partition."

### **Concluding remarks**

It appears that at its core is the ideology of cultural and religious nationalism, which was promoted by the legends of BJP. Therefore, the student of ABVP believes that 'Hindu Rashtra, Hindu caste (race) and Hindu culture are ideal'. For the other groups, who keep a different view from their counterpart, opine that 'voter dissents voted BJP for the economic and technological development, but in return, what they got 'hate,' violence, lynching, vandalism, hooliganism, and some other irrelevant issues. Lacking accountability to the poor is another feature of the current ruling party. Opinions for change being colored as offenses, voiced through peaceful protests held undemocratic, non-secular.

Resultantly, a total of 12,652 protests were organized in New Delhi in 2019. This is 46 percent more than in 2018. Since 2011, Delhi Police has started collecting such data and since then it is the largest number. Earlier in 2015, there were 11,158 picket-protests. However, the 2019 figures include the performance till December 15, so the number will increase further by adding the last two weeks of dharna demonstration. It appears that there is a season of movements, processions in the country. Challenging the bitter cold of North India, youth and students from different cities and universities from New Delhi to Ahmedabad-Hyderabad are on the road against the CAA and NRC, the National Citizenship Register, the beating of students and the fees increase, etc. Kerala, Assam, and Bengal not only have their resonance, but their huge form is also visible. It is interesting that at some places, processions are coming out against these movements. That is, if one party has taken out a procession against the citizenship law, the other is taking out in support of it. They are smothered to be succumbed by the bureaucratic forces who are inhumanly transgressing boundaries of student life with the apparatus of violence and threat. This paper has given students prospective of socio-political consequences and there is a great need to know and carry out research on some other aspects of CAA to get more comprehensive understanding.

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